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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 24 July 1992, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. MROZIEWICZ (Poland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued)
(E/1992/63; E/1992/L.30)

Ms. LIMJUCO (Philippines), introducing draft resolution E/1992/L.30, said that the Council's current review of the conditions necessary for the effective functioning of the Non-Governmental Organizations Unit was the first such review since 1947. It was clear from the Secretary-General's report (E/1992/63) that the Unit's workload had grown tremendously although the resources available to it had not increased since the 1940s. The difficulties faced by the Unit in discharging its functions called for measures of two kinds: urgent short-term action with a view to the forthcoming session of the Council's Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations; and long-term perspectives within the framework of the biennium 1994-1995. Draft resolution E/1992/L.30 addressed those concerns. The preambular part reflected the fact that it was by virtue of the Charter itself that non-governmental organizations had been brought into a consultative relationship with the Council and that their status derived from a Council resolution, 1296 (XLIV). The operative part dealt with the short- and long-term measures required. Adoption of that text would render the Unit more effective in serving the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations and thus the Council itself.

COORDINATION QUESTIONS:

(b) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES BY THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNITED NATIONS (A/47/281; A/47/212-E/1992/54; E/1992/85)

(c) INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF INFORMATICS (E/1992/55, 78)

Mr. LOHIA (Chairman of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of

(Mr. Lohia)

Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples) welcomed the continued involvement of the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations in the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, including the steady flow of assistance to Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories, as noted in the report in document E/1992/85. The Special Committee was grateful to UNDP for its lead role in financing developing projects in those Territories, and to the relevant executing agencies and institutions, a number of whose recent activities he cited. Those agencies were urged to pursue and expand their development activities, especially in the Caribbean and Pacific regions, where the majority of the remaining Territories were located, and to bear in mind the handicap that some of those Territories suffered as a result of their smallness, remoteness, lack of infrastructure and dependence on external financial resources.

The aim should be not only to complete the decolonization process, for which the General Assembly had deemed the end of the twentieth century a target date, but to accelerate and monitor more closely the Territories' economic and social development, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/70. He appealed to the agencies and institutions to contribute more to discussions on those Territories, in the light of that resolution, and to provide more opportunities, in their relevant deliberations, for representatives of the Territories to take part. A draft resolution on those matters would be submitted at the end of the General debate on the current item; he hoped that the Council would give it the widest possible support.

Ms. THOMPSON (Director, Electronic Services Division, Office of General Services), introducing the report in document E/1992/78, said that it reflected the outcome of the growing availability of microcomputer technology, which, together with constantly falling prices for telecommunications, created ever more demand for access to informatics systems. Earlier major databases had not been designed with non-technical users in mind; systems and target audiences had differed, too. Although Member States had had direct dial access to United Nations databases since 1986, access procedures were not widely known. More than 56 nations currently had access to the New York

(Ms. Thompson)

Computer Section (NYCS) mainframe computer but there had been no systematic, centralized effort to keep nations informed.

As a preliminary step towards clarifying the status of the technological infrastructure of missions in New York and Geneva and identifying needs, a questionnaire had been circulated, the good response to which had shown that the computerized information of greatest interest related to full texts of documents, resolutions and treaties, press releases, bibliographic information and statistical/economic data. The response had also identified problems still to be addressed: the need for user-friendly access and a continuous flow of information to Member States, continuous training programmes, policy coordination and the expansion of on-line access to the United Nations system as a whole. Although much could be done within existing resources, the longer-term solution would require funds for the requisite technology and staffing.

Mr. KHAN (Chief, Inter-Agency Coordination Branch, Department of Economic and Social Development), introducing the Secretary-General's report on international cooperation in the field of informatics (E/1992/55), said that the report responded to the Council's request contained in resolution 1991/71, with a view to regular consultations and coordination concerning informatics within the United Nations system and to the strengthening of subprogrammes concerning international cooperation and regional strategies in informatics in developing countries.

The current and planned activities outlined in section I of the report focused on two main types of project. The first, of a global nature, focused on coordination at the level of headquarters of agencies and institutions with a view to making information generally available among them as well as to Governments. The second aimed at coordination in regard to technical cooperation projects, at national or regional levels, aimed at strengthening developing countries' capacities in the field of informatics. The activities also reflected the wide diversity of mandates throughout the United Nations system, which could be listed under three general categories: general research and development in areas of potential application to developing countries, including strategies and policies for informatics; dissemination of

(Mr. Khan)

technology through training workshops, seminars, advisory services and software development; and the development of international databases and information systems in specific fields such as management, technical cooperation and statistics.

The report also highlighted the main existing coordination mechanisms in the United Nations system, such as the Advisory Committee for Coordination of Information Systems (ACCIS) and the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities. The recommendations contained in section II of the report included the development of a general framework for overall inter-agency coordination of information systems with a view to their systematic application in developing countries.

He was confident that the Council would endorse the findings and recommendations contained in the report and would encourage agencies and Governments to promote consultations and coordination concerning informatics with a view to enhancing international cooperation in that important field.

Mr. SHAUKAT (Pakistan) said that the report in document E/1992/78 recognized the Member States' desire for easy access to United Nations databases, while noting that procedures for access to them were not yet widely known and that no systematic, centralized effort had been made to keep Governments and their missions informed. His delegation noted with interest the Secretariat's measures in response to Council resolution 1991/70. It urged the Electronic Services Division of the Office of General Services to expedite the plans to simplify access to the main database systems, and suggested that ACCIS and UNITAR should arrange more training programmes for the diplomatic communities in Geneva and in New York. The Member States must also be kept fully and continuously informed about United Nations database activities; their representatives must be actively associated with, and duly represented on, relevant executive and governing bodies such as the International Computing Centre (ICC) and ACCIS in order that the Member States, as end users, could be given due priority. The Secretariat should take urgent measures accordingly, if necessary by means of a phased programme, the initial phases of which could be supported from existing resources. In that regard, Pakistan would co-sponsor a draft resolution for adoption at the Council's current session. His delegation appreciated the role of the

(Mr. Shaukat, Pakistan)

Intergovernmental Informatics Programme of UNESCO, and urged the United Nations system to formulate suitable training programmes, including programmes to impart software expertise in the developing countries.

Mr. SHAHEED (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the importance of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was evidenced by the fact that more than half of the current membership of the Organization could trace their independence, in part, to its adoption. The Special Committee on decolonization had constantly stressed the need for the establishment of conditions that would facilitate the development of colonial Territories after independence, and the General Assembly had repeatedly called for cooperation by the United Nations system to that end.

The General Assembly had repeatedly reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Pending the attainment of self-determination, the General Assembly had stated the need for development projects in the occupied territories and the establishment of development banks to promote investment and thus improve living conditions.

Unfortunately, the assistance provided by the United Nations system was not commensurate with the problem facing the Arab people, who were the victims of a misguided and arbitrary Israeli security policy. The only "crime" committed by the Palestinian people was to seek self-determination, as was their inalienable right. Israel must withdraw from all the occupied territories and recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people if there was to be lasting peace in the region.

Lastly, he welcomed the cooperation between the Special Committee on decolonization and the Special Committee against Apartheid in seeking to apply the provisions of the Declaration so as to eliminate the last vestiges of colonialism.

Mr. OWOLABI (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1991/71, had recommended regular consultation and coordination within the United Nations system in the field of informatics. Accordingly UNESCO had included informatics among its priorities for the biennium 1992-1993. The main focus was on human resources development and on the Intergovernmental Informatics Programme (IIP).

(Mr. Owolabi, UNESCO)

The emphasis in human resources development was on training in informatics. A substantial element was the Informafrica programme, aimed at developing specialized personnel and promoting exchanges of information on informatics.

The aim of IIP was to strengthen regional cooperation and to contribute to the development of informatics infrastructures. UNESCO was involved in coordinating the sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee for IIP and in providing hardware, software and documentation to least developed countries. IIP projects included developing centres for the production of software and strengthening the existing regional informatics networks.

UNESCO was concerned to avoid duplication by the specialized agencies, and coordinated its programme of activities with its fellow agencies.

Mr. WHANNOU (Benin) said that the adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples had inspired the attainment of independence by many colonial territories, including his own country. His Government firmly supported the United Nations strategy for the elimination of colonialism by the year 2000. The Special Committee on decolonization and the Secretariat must make the international community aware of the problems facing Non-Self-Governing Territories so that conditions could be promoted that would facilitate the exercise of the right to self-determination.

In that connection his delegation welcomed the role played by the specialized agencies. It was important to ensure that their activities were coordinated so as to maximize the impact of scarce resources in the promotion of sustainable development. That supposed prior policy coordination, which in turn implied providing those concerned with an opportunity to make their views known regarding their social and economic development. To that end administering Powers should promote regional seminars, similar to the one recently held in Grenada. His delegation welcomed the suggestion made at that seminar for the establishment of a unit to ensure coordination of specialized-agency activities in Non-Self-Governing Territories, a proposal which the Council should support.

Mr. KHADER (United Nations Development Programme) said that UNDP had joined with its fellow agencies and other development partners in seeking ways to help South Africa's transition to a post-apartheid society. Since UNDP was not mandated to support operational activities within South Africa, it had limited its involvement to externally based projects aimed at assisting national liberation movements in the field of human resources development.

During the fifth programming cycle UNDP would continue to support health and education programmes for South African groups in exile. The Programme had established an informal consultative forum with other multilateral donors to identify areas for collaboration in post-apartheid South Africa. The participants in the forum had announced their intention to establish a trust fund as a catalyst for resource mobilization. UNDP would continue to work with those partners in meeting needs already identified.

UNDP was committed to operating within the parameters established by resolutions of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity, and fully supported a coordinated approach to assisting development in South Africa.

UNDP assistance to the Palestinian people was concentrated in four key sectors: environmental management, private-sector development, human development and women in development. The Governing Council had authorized a 25-per-cent increase in core resources for the period 1992-1996.

Nevertheless, the resources available to assist the Palestinian people were modest in comparison with their extraordinary needs, and their overall conditions of life remained difficult. UNDP had engaged in a needs assessment exercise to help ensure that its work was targeted, relevant and sustainable. Should further development efforts be required as a result of the current peace negotiations, UNDP was well positioned to respond. Lastly, the programme had commissioned a review of its role and modus operandi, which would be available by the end of 1992.

Mr. ABU-KOASH (Observer for Palestine) thanked Member States, United Nations bodies and intergovernmental and other organizations that provided assistance to the Palestinian people, and urged them to continue and expand their cooperation with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). He also hoped that the Israeli authorities would remove the obstacles that they had

(Mr. Abu-Koash, Observer, Palestine)

placed in the path of inter-agency development projects on behalf of the Palestinian people, and that they would put into practical effect the new message of peace.

Palestinians had greatly suffered because of the Gulf crisis in terms of employment and economic recession, and the international community should play its part in the effort to bring about reconstruction and the reintegration of Palestinians displaced as a result of the conflict.

Israel should be accountable for all the losses and expropriations to which the Palestinian population had been subjected, and should end its occupation of Palestinian territories, the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon.

His delegation was deeply grateful to UNDP for its continuing help, and expressed the hope that, in the new atmosphere of political change, the international community would continue to press for the implementation of projects which the Israeli Government had consistently blocked.

Mr. DEEN (Inter Press Service News Agency) said that, as an international non-governmental organization with a global communications network spread across 85 developing countries, Inter Press Service (IPS) had traditionally worked in close collaboration with the United Nations system. It focused on key development issues. As a non-governmental organization with category I consultative status with the Council, IPS wished to share its expertise in the field of informatics and communications with the United Nations system, and specifically with the new Department of Economic and Social Development. It would also welcome the opportunity to share its experience, particularly in database and software development and information services, with the regional commissions, United Nations agencies and Member States.

The regional commissions, which now maintained databases on economic, social and demographic statistics, could be considerably strengthened if they were able to avail themselves of the voluminous news output of the IPS wire service, which was closely focused on the United Nations system, both at the headquarters level and in the field. At a wider international level, IPS had already become involved in the Rome-based Technological Information Pilot System (TIPS), established in 1984 by UNDP to promote and sustain South-South technical cooperation. Administered by IPS and financed largely by the

(Mr. Deen)

Italian Government, TIPS was a mechanism for the daily exchange of information on scientific, technological and business opportunities in developing countries. It had so far produced more than 32,000 detailed information abstracts on 14 different scientific, technological and business sectors. It had also gathered information on more than 10,000 companies offering and requesting products and processes which were not yet part of the TIPS network, but which might be interested in future membership. With the aim of furnishing appropriate information technology to countries of the South, IPS had also designed and implemented a programme to computerize six African news agencies, with financial assistance from the Italian Government.

Although relatively new to the ranks of non-governmental organizations, IPS was aware of the increasingly active role of those organizations in the United Nations system. As one of the few communications-oriented Non-Governmental Organizations enjoying consultative status with the Council, IPS wished to contribute its expertise in order to enhance the information flow within that system.

In conclusion, he suggested that in any future study on informatics, it would be useful to survey the number of Non-Governmental Organizations with information data that could be shared with other non-governmental bodies, the United Nations system and Member States.

Mr. TENNE (Observer for Israel) said that numerous and fanciful allegations, misconceptions and errors had been made in the course of the Council's debates on such issues as human rights, sovereignty over national resources and the advancement of women: all of them concerned the situation in the territories administered by Israel, and most were ill-intentioned. It was time to set the record straight.

Four years of strikes and other problems related to the violence which went under the name of the intifadah had taken their toll on the economy of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. In 1991, the Gulf war had dealt a further blow to the economy of the area. In the first part of 1991, the economy had been adversely affected by Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein; direct and indirect financial assistance provided by the Gulf States and other Arab countries had been withdrawn as a result of the position taken by the PLO during the Gulf war; worsening economic conditions in Jordan had led to a loss

(Mr. Tenne, Observer, Israel)

of employment opportunities and the return to the area of local residents; disruptive strikes had discouraged Israeli businessmen from employing Palestinians; and disturbances had led to the imposition of curfews. In addition, markets in some Arab countries had been closed, or virtually closed, to products and produce from the area as a result of Arab anger at the PLO's pro-Iraqi position during the Gulf crisis, and rising unemployment in Israel caused by the recession and higher immigration had led to increased competition for a limited number of jobs.

The economic situation in the administered territories at the end of the Gulf war had thus been typified by stagnation, high unemployment and uncertainty regarding the future. However, despite a general mood of depression following the defeat of Iraq, which many Palestinians had seen as the champion of their cause, an atmosphere of greater realism and pragmatism had emerged, manifested in the widespread desire to concentrate on economic recovery and development.

A principal aim of the authorities in the territories in 1991 had been to spur the new mood of realism and to promote economic growth through the encouragement of investments, the improvement of productive capacity and the creation of new sources of employment. In particular, an administrative order adopted in June 1991 on encouragement of capital investments had provided for the creation and recognition of approved enterprises and approved investments, with a wide range of tax benefits. That represented a notable departure in that requests to open new businesses had previously been assessed on the criterion of the competition they might generate between the local economy and the economy inside Israel. That was no longer a consideration, and approval was now granted even where there was direct competition with existing Israeli businesses. Moreover, existing enterprises which wished to expand their activities could enjoy tax benefits for the expansion. New regulations had also been issued in November 1991 with the aim of simplifying the income-tax structure in Judea, Samaria and Gaza and, where possible, reducing the tax burden on individuals.

By the end of 1991, it had become clear that, despite the severe setbacks of the Gulf war, the economic situation in the area had entered a phase of recovery, in which the civil administration played a key role. In various

(Mr. Tenne, Observer, Israel)

sectors of the economy, there had been a significant upward swing, particularly in quarrying, the establishment of new enterprises, and tourism. There was thus evidence of prospects for future growth and a growing interest in establishing enterprises which could spearhead economic development.

The administration's underlying objective was to encourage the development of small industries by promoting economic investment and entrepreneurial initiatives. Much remained to be done, and the administration would continue its efforts to promote economic and social activity in the territories, in conjunction with parallel efforts by other countries and international bodies. The extent of the programmes listed in the Secretary-General's report (A/47/212-E/1992/54) indicated that the situation in the territories was anything but stagnant, and that the impact of international assistance, with Israeli guidance and encouragement, was making itself felt in a wide range of economic activities.

Eventually, however, the Palestinians living in those territories must realize that assistance could be fully delivered only by the Palestinians themselves. Their professed supporters in the United Nations and in other international organizations would not act for them. The Palestinians should seize the opportunity to work with the Israeli authorities in creating a future in which resources were no longer devoted to violence but to social and economic progress for all.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.